

Willowbrook Plays Leading Part In Winning Fight on Measles

By SANDRA FREED

The end may be in sight for one of the most serious epidemic diseases of childhood—common measles.

Since 1963, when the first measles vaccine was licensed, some 12 million children have been vaccinated, according to figures of the Medical and Pharmaceutical Information Bureau.

In the first six months of 1966, reported measles incidence was down by more than 20 per cent from the same period in 1965, and by almost half from the median incidence for the 1961 to 1965 period.

Common measles should not be confused with German, or three-day measles.

Groups all over the country cooperated in research on the vaccine before it was licensed; one strain in 1963, another in 1965. A study of the vaccine still going on at Willowbrook State School was instrumental in the licensing of one strain of vaccine, the Edmonston strain, as early as 1963.

The study began in 1960 under the direction of Dr. Robert Ward and Dr. Saul Krugman of New York University. Dr. Joan Giles, research associate professor of pediatrics at NYU-Bellevue Medical Center and an attending physician at Willowbrook, is head of the study at the Island institution.

Beginning in 1960, all children entering the institution were immunized against measles with the Edmonston strain vaccine. In 1960, an epidemic caused 600 cases of the disease.

From a time after the epidemic until January, 1963, there were an estimated 50 cases of

measles, Dr. Krugman recalled yesterday. These cases occurred in children who had not been vaccinated, probably because their parents had not granted permission, he said.

The doctors began testing the second strain of vaccine, known as the Schwartz strain, in 1962.

Dr. Krugman stated that since 1963, there were no confirmed cases of measles in any child vaccinated at Willowbrook. At this institution of approximately 6,000 patients, measles has virtually been eliminated, Dr. Giles commented.

The continuing study now concentrates on testing the effectiveness of the two strains.

"We know the vaccine is effective for at least six year," Dr. Krugman said, adding that the tests at Willowbrook probably would go on for a few more years.

Dr. Krugman, who is chairman of New York University's department of pediatrics, said the Willowbrook study represents the longest follow-up study of any being conducted.

Every year, blood tests are taken on a certain number of the children vaccinated. The tests have shown that one shot produces about the same number of antibodies in the blood, or about the same response as a case of the measles.

Dr. Krugman and his associates are conducting a similar tests on a group of Hicksville, N.Y., children.

"We're proud of our part in

this important study," said Dr. Jack Hammond, senior director of Willowbrook.

The importance of the measles vaccine is constantly elevated by new research. A recent finding were traces of measles virus in the brain during — and before — the red-rash phase of the disease. This suggests encephalitis may be something other than an after-effect of the disease.

Unfortunately, there are an estimated 12,000,000 susceptible children still unprotected by the vaccine, states the U.S. Public Health Service.

New York City children unprotected should be few in number. Since 1963, the City Health Department has been vaccinating against measles. A Health Dept. spokesman estimated about 1,000 children a week have been vaccinated since August, 1965.

New York State was the first state to actually recognize common measles officially as a major public health threat.

A state law makes the vaccine available without charge to private physicians, hospitals and clinics for immunization of

any New York child requiring it. The report of the Medical and Pharmaceutical Information Bureau included these findings about measles, turned up in recent years.

If unprotected, at least 90 per cent of children get measles.

The disease ends fatally in one of every 1,100 reported cases.

In one of every 15 cases, there are complications ranging from middle-ear infection to bronchitis, croup and pneumonia.

In almost one of every two cases, health is below par for as long as 12 months after the measles.